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AUTHOR Hill, Jeff
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ABSTRACT

An English teacher at Hokkaido International School, Japan, guided his students through the writing process of thinking up ideas for writing topics and developing and revising those ideas into competent works. The class was composed of seven non-native speakers (in grades nine through twelve) who tried to achieve fluency in English within the context of an English literature class. The teacher motivated students by: (1) making it known specifically what kind of written assignments would be required; (2) reminding the students that they did not have to start at the beginning when they wrote; and (3) inviting students' thoughts and complaints in class discussion. Students read books, short stories, essays, and poems, and watched video taped movies with the theme of man's search for self identity and nobility. The teacher repeatedly communicated to the class that he was engaging them in the type of analytical discussions encountered in graduate school. Classroom discussions served as brainstorming sessions, prewriting, and revising. Due dates for writing assignments were flexible. Students' papers were read out loud sentence by sentence, with teacher and students discussing in a conversational tone the merits or weaknesses of the sentences. Final examinations indicated that every student demonstrated recall of the entire year's study. Several of the students became exchange students in the United States, and one wrote the teacher a letter which demonstrated developed powers of observation, analysis, description, and retention. (The students's letter is attached.) (RS)

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ED 363 879

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DEVELOPING WRITING AND THINKING SKILLS IN THE STUDENT

Jeff Hill

Recent academic works tend to describe the stunting aspect of traditional English classes of prior generations in contrast to the benefits to be derived from the new waves in educational approaches. One of the most vivid images is presented by R. D. Walsh (1991):

"Let's recall in stereotype the traditional tell'm, drill'm and test'm classroom, with its didactic teacher who saw children as by nature unwilling learners and who periodically imposed a 'composition' to be written at a single sitting, and with little or no discussion. No mention was made of revising, except for 'proofreading' at the end; nor was there any one-to-one conversation between teacher and pupil. Mechanical and grammatical correctness, with neatness, was the desired product. The pupils almost all disliked writing and avoided it when they could."

In recalling the above stereotype and in remembering myself as a pupil within exactly such a system, the term "disliked writing" is a gross understatement. I dreaded writing assignments. Within the format as articulated by R.D. Walshe, I suffered through the process of knowing that what I

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was writing was never going to be what the teacher wanted; and subsequently having that depressing thought reinforced by the low grade and critical symbols written all over my "composition" when it was returned. Come to think of it, the first time I ever wrote anything that elicited anything akin to positive reinforcement from a teacher was when as a high school sophomore I was given a full weekend to write on the theme of education and I wrote on the reasons why I dreaded writing compositions.

I happen to like writing now. But in reading over what tends to characterize descriptions of the more progressive approaches to orchestrating Language Arts classes, I again feel like a junior high school student who dreads writing compositions. I formidabl the assumption that the students will be delighted to have a writing assignment and that they will not be put off by a teacher telling them that whatever they write, they are going to have to write it again and again until they get it right; and that any student who is NOT delighted at such prospects can be written off as unworthy.

There are several valid and valuable points made about the nature of the writing process but, in general, I don't think contemporary researchers present enough specific examples of how to spark the students' imagination to write; how to give them both the freedom of theme, and guidance in structure at the same time; how to overcome their aversion to, if not fear of writing; and most specifically: how to guide them through

the various stages of thinking up, fleshing out and revising without the students getting the impression that they are "doing it again until they get it right".

THE QUESTIONS

Therefore, we have the questions: How can the teacher guide the students through the writing process of thinking up ideas for writing topics, developing those ideas and revising those ideas into competent works without the students getting the impression that they are "doing it again until they get it right'? How can the students be guided to use such a process to develop their powers of observation, analysis, description and retention?

THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Within the context of my teaching position at Hokkaido International School, my specific challenge also involved helping a class composed of non-native speakers achieve fluency in the English language within the context of an English literature class. Furthermore, the one class was composed of students in grades nine through twelve with the added irony that the most capable and emotionally mature student was a ninth grade Japanese girl and the most immature student was a twelfth grade Japanese boy. The tremendous advantage I had was that the entire class was composed of only seven students. A further advantage was that all seven students were enrolled at Hokkaido International School as a prefered alternative to going to a Japaneese Ministry of Education school: with the

exception of Masaki, all the students were happy to be attending a school which allowed them some creativity and individualized instruction. Masaki seemed to be at H.I.S. out of the expectation that it would simply be less demanding than a Japanese school.

THE STUDENTS

Rei: Ninth grade Japanese girl. Fluent with the English language at the start of the course. Fluency achieved almost totally within Japan. Experience in a foreign country was limited to two months of homestay in America two years before the start of the course. Nobody else in Rei's family knew any English.

Jin: Tenth grade. Blond son of an American father and an American mother, Jin was born and raised in Japan. Jin attended Japanese schools from kindergarten through sixth grade and therefore knew Japanese as his native language. Speaking and writing English were very hard for him. Quiet but cheerful.

Mieko: Tenth grade Japanese girl. Very capable with English as a foreign language but not fully fluent. Relatively quiet and very pleasant.

Azusa: Tenth grade Japanese girl. Moderately capable with English as a foreign language. Almost never spoke in class but cheerful enough: often laughed at jokes made in either Japanese or English.

Takeaki: Eleventh grade. Son of Japanese father and American

mother. Born and raised in Japan with Japanese as his native language. But preferred the American culture and wanted to be considered an American. He hated his junior high years in a Japanese school and to date didn't even want to talk about that part of his life. Attended Hokkaido International School in ninth grade and then attended a school in Canada for tenth grade. Returned to H.I.S. for eleventh grade. Slight problem with stuttering.

Tomoko: Eleventh grade Japanese girl. Third year at H.I.S. When Tomoko started at H.I.S., she knew essentially no English at all. But she was always very cheerful and she was accepted by all faculty and student body almost as a beloved pet. She would sit in class next to a bilingual student who would give her a running verbal translation of everything the teacher was saying. For essentially one calendar year it was impossible for Tomoko to really function as a participating student for academic credit even though she was doing five hours of homework per night. Finally, as a tenth grade student who still could not speak English, she handed in an essay on the assigned topic of an admired person; living or dead; famous or personal acquaintance. Tomoko wrote about her father. She wrote about a man who had been a worker in a factory until he got both his legs caught in a machine. I corrected her grammar and spelling:

"When he woke up in the hospital, he cried out, "My legs! Where are my legs?

"When he left the hospital, he couldn't go back to work in the factory so he had to find something else he could do. He learned printing and opened up a printing shop.

"He married his nurse and I was born.

"When people hear that my father has no legs, they think that he cannot do anything. But actually, my father can do many things. They think that he cannot take a bath by himself. But actually, when I was a baby, when he took a bath, he gave me a bath at he same time.

"My father has learned how to do many things by himself. But the hardest thing for him to learn was how to accept help for those things that he really cannot do by himself."

Tomoko still remained essentially verbally silent in class for one more year. One notable exception occurred in literature class when Tomoko was a tenth grader. We were discussing my observation that any given writer's concept of paradise usually involved a bountiful supply of whatever it was that was conspicuously lacking during the writer's time and place; or lack of whatever it was that tormented the writer's generation or personal life. When I asked the students for their own thoughts along such lines in answer to the coffee shop question of, "What's your impression of paradise?", Tomoko impulsively burst out, "No homework!"

Masaki: Twelfth grade Japanese boy. Most difficult individual in the entire school from grades 6 through 12 to have as a student. Started H.I.S. as a seventh grader. Was reasonably

capable with the English language by grade ten at H.I.S.: at the time when Tomoko entered knowing essentially no English at all. But improvement very slow since. By start of course, level lower than Tomoko. Poor attendance. Discipline problem in that he often sat in class mumbling in Japanese to other students distracting them from the course given in English.

Masaki never learned to apply himself to anything. At the end of the school year, on a hiking trip I asked the students to mug for the camera, looking cheerful for the first picture and then mean for the second picture. Masaki looked sullen in all the pictures I took that day.

THE FORMAT

At the beginning of the course I told the students that we would not be reading for the purpose of memorizing but that we would develop the power of recall so that what we read in September would be fondly recalled in June. I told the students that we would not be working on creating our own works of fiction but that we would develop written analytical skills. In working with the students with the aim of developing their thinking and writing abilities within the context of an English literature course, the following classroom relationship developed. Although I had clearly in my mind the above

delineated questions as goals of the course, what developed can more accurately be described as a relationship amongst ourselves than it can be described as my own educational strategy with the course:

1: I tried to motivate the students by making it known as specifically as possible what kind of written assignment would be required and how it would be graded. I anticipated the students' most likely question of "how long does it have to be?" by discussing with them one essential aspect of communication in general and of the writing process in particular: having something to say. We talked about my opinion that before worrying about filling up a piece of paper with a required number of words, the writer should get excited about what he wants to say; and then try to make each point in as FEW words as possible.

2: I guided the students towards the goal by giving them pointers, encouragement, opportunity, etc.

a: I reminded the students that they didn't have to worry about starting at the beginning when they wrote. They could jot down thoughts as they came and piece them together later. I communicated to the students that they didn't have to worry about getting ideas. If they didn't have any of their own, they would get plenty of ideas as a result of our class discussions. I communicated to the students that is not plagiarism but perfectly acceptable journalism to work on a piece that is not an original story nor even an original thesis

but merely a competent critique of what was discussed in class. Therefore, I told myself, even the student who starts out convinced he has absolutely no talent or even capacity for writing will be motivated to at least pay attention in class.

As the course progressed, my optimistic forecast was realized. As the students saw each other getting positive reinforcement in the form of good grades and verbal and written praise on their essays which were little more than critiques of classroom discussions, they started taking notes in class in preparation for such critiques. Class participation increased: asking questions at first and then offering observations. And finally, much to their own amazement, some of the students started pouring out original thoughts on a creative essays.

b: I invited student's thoughts in class discussion not by blankly stating: "tell me whatever you think" but instead by specifically inviting complaints, fears, anxieties, specific problems, etc. I encouraged articulation of the specific complaints of the reading and writing assignments as seen as unfair, too much, too difficult, a waste of time, etc. Encouragement was in the form of sincere words of praise during class discussion to the student who brought up a point that was probably bothering other students, too. Student articulation of such specific complaints led to one or more of the following during a class session:

(1) In the process of communicating his specific complaints the student on his own came to see the

value of the assignment after all. I would congratulate the student on having engaged in a valuable aspect of the thinking process. This often led to discussions on those writers who became famous, renowned and, in contemporary times, supremely wealthy through using the medium of writing to work out personal frustrations and even as outright psycho therapy: E.A. Poe (examples obvious); Hemingway (whose anger about unfair, unfeeling and ignorant literary critics led him to portray them as sharks tearing apart his beloved "fish"); Woody Allen (who has built a career as a writer, comedian, director, producer and actor around being neurotic); William Styron (who, when asked about the female character in SOPHIE'S CHOICE who compulsively used invitingly erotic language but who turned out to be frustratingly frigid; and who really didn't have much to do with the story; chuckled and said, "Yes, that was a nice exorcism"); Kurt Vonnegut (who characterizes himself as "an old fart who smokes too many Pall Malls" and repeatedly refers to specific pieces of his works as having been "good therapy"); and Stephen King (who is continuing to make millions of dollars per book contract on the recurring images prompted by having had a brother who died when an adolescent).

(2) As the teacher, I was given a chance to answer each specific complaint. Because we had the format of class discussion, the answer sometime came from another student. Therefore, the same complaints that would otherwise be expressed in the form of student-student whining in the

hallway about the teacher as weird, out-of-it, too hard, and various vernaculars for "oppressive"; became starting points for satisfying student-teacher and student-student dialogues.

(3) At the very least, the student learned to express himself in ways other than slamming the locker door and grunting obscenities. In pointing this out to the students, I discovered another bountiful area for class discussions: that there is nothing really evil about periodically slamming a locker door or using a "bad word"; but that the individual whose communication skills become limited to violent outbursts and a limited range of predictable four letter words is falling prey to one of the greatest social sins of all: that of being boring. This message came out not as patronizing preaching but with academic enthusiasm: the students could see that I enjoyed pointing out that the research of several psychiatrists and PhD's in language and communication have brought out that what is known as obscene language is in general used indiscriminately as Neanderthal grunts by the lower classes, feared by the middle classes and used quite a bit but selectively, creatively and essentially secretly by the upper classes; that such was generally known by linguistic academics as far back as the early 1960's but the stream of "expletive deleted"s emanating from the Nixon tapes which hit the American public in 1973 caused a stampede of students and scholars to research and discuss the patterns in profanity.

I showed video scenes which involve obscene language and

invited class discussions on what they perceive to be constituting colorful communication and what they perceive to be offensive and boring. (Along with myself, my own students all found Christopoher Walken's use of profanity in "Boloxi Blues" to be delightful.)

THE DISCUSSIONS

Throughout the prior year with a literature class involving Mieko, Masaki and Tomoko we had studied from the anthology CLASSICS IN WORLD LITERATURE (Scott, Foresman; 1989). The selections we studied all seemed to fit together under the overall theme of man's eternal search for paradise and how, if he ever finds it, he discovers it to be a disappointment; if not hell. This year we read books, short stories, essays and poems and watched video taped movies which all seemed to fit together under the theme of man's search for self identity and nobility.

We began the new school year with a unit devoted to comparing and contrasting the novel SHANE with the motion picture "Hondo". During each 50 minute class session we would watch an average of about 15 minutes of the video taped film and then discuss the similarities and differences with the novel. When at first the students had no observations to offer, I pointed out that in both stories the title is the name

of the main character. The class reaction was, "You mean we can say something as simple as that?!"

"Sure", I encouraged them. "It's a similarity." After that, the elements of similarity and contrast trickled out of the students: Both stories begin with a boy spotting the arrival of a lone man. In SHANE, the lone man arrives on horseback in fine clothes without any visible firearms but in "Hondo", the lone man arrives on foot carrying a rifle and wearing worn out clothes and in apparent trouble. Whereas SHANE is written in the first person in mask as a young boy's recollections, "Hondo" is written in the third person. Classroom discussion comparing and contrasting the two stories continued for the next two weeks. In the process of our discussions, the students learned literary terms and concepts such as "mask", "foreshadowing", "protagonist", "antagonist", "conflict", etc. We discussed the historical and geographical backgrounds as relevant to both stories. Also, we discussed psychological and philosophical definitions of "self". Using blackboard diagrams, I explained how the western concept of "self" tends to be, "you are everything you have ever experienced up until this moment plus everything you expect to be"; whereas the Japanese concept of "self" tends to be, "you are what you do".

Takeaki asked me, "Which one do you believe?"

I explained to the class that, as an American with an MA in Far East Asian Studies who has lived in Japan for twenty

years, I believe both concepts are relevant to describing the human self of any nationality; that it is just that Americans tend to think more of one concept whereas Japanese tend to think more of the other. By thinking in culturally international terms, we come to a clearer understanding of who we are.

As we got into such discussions, I repeatedly communicated to the class that I was engaging them in the type of discussions I had encountered when in graduate school. Throughout the course of the year, I repeatedly communicated to the students that when I was a student in junior high, high school and the first two years of college, almost everything was quite difficult for me: that because of the rote memorization nature of so many of the courses, I had found it difficult to understand, let alone remember anything; but that because everything we studied in graduate school involved analytical discussion, I enjoyed everything, I understood everything, and I still retain the memory of everything I studied 18 years ago. I also communicated to my students that my feeling at the time as a graduate student was, "Hey, this approach to study is easy and fun! Why didn't they let us study this way in junior high and high school?" I repeatedly told the class that it was my consistent impression that they were sufficiently sophisticated to handle such graduate school level discussions. They responded to such positive reinforcement by truly enjoying the discussions. The one

exception was Masaki, whose self identity as a con-man never really changed: he never got out of the behavior pattern of trying to come up with the correct catch phrase which would win points.

During one discussion I mentioned the theory by the Japanese scholar Watsuji Tetsuro in his work CLIMATE AND CULTURE that the Japanese people are chronically insecure and emotional because of the existence of frequent earthquakes in Japan.

"I don't believe that!" Rei exclaimed.

"You don't have to", I countered. "It isn't even my opinion. It comes from Watsuji Tetsuro." But I did start making a strong case for why I believe Japanese pretend to be impassive but are actually very emotional. When Rei challenged me with, "YOU are being emotional right now!", I asserted, "I am not being emotional; I am being emphatic!" At that moment every student in the class with the exception of Masaki learned the meaning of the word "emphatic" through context, voice tone and the gesture of my slapping the desk.

The next day Rei started the class by telling me that she had told her father about the theory that Japanese are insecure and emotional because of the earthquakes; and that she had been quite surprised that her father's reaction was, "Yes. I think that's right."

Months later a historical observation came up about the seeming inevitability of economic decline in any given culture

due to complacency. When I added, "But that may not necessarily be true in the case of Japan. And do you know why?", the entire room of students recited on as if on cue: "Earthquakes".

Throughout the course of the year we used the following works as mediums to develop classroom discussions which were eventually followed by writing assignments:

SHANE	novel
"Hondo"	1953 film
ICEBERG HERMIT	novel based on probable true story
ONCE IN THE SADDLE	non fiction narration of cowboy life
"Youth"	short story
TESTAMENT OF YOUTH	autobiography
"Boloxi Blues"	1988 film
"If"	poem
"Robin Hood"	1990 film
LORD OF THE FLIES	novel
"Lord of the Flies"	1990 film
"The Wild One"	1953 film
OUT OF AFRICA	Autobiography
"Out of Africa"	1986 film
"The African Queen"	1950 film
"Lean on Me"	1989 film
"Platoon"	1987 film

A classroom environment and understanding developed wherein any member of the class, whether student or teacher,

was free to go off on any tangent as long as it could be justified as valuable to the over all topic of discussion. Quite often, it became my job to establish the relevance between the topic of discussion and the spontaneous thought brought up by one of the students. Because everyone knew that we always had the assigned reading to fall back on as a safety net should the discussion dry up, the discussions were never strained. The students knew that the more they participated in developing our discussions, the slower would be the pace of the assigned readings; and the more postponed would be the eventual write-up of the unit. Eventually, the students were bringing in relevant-to-the-reading topics to start class discussions. Such student action was one way of guaranteeing that I wouldn't be asking them comprehension questions on the reading assignments that class period. But because I continually congratulated the students on their initiative, there did not exist the cynical atmosphere of students trying to manipulate the teacher away from formal study and assignments. Instead, there developed a fuller student body pride in participating in the design of the course. The students became fully aware that the purpose of any literature course is NOT to make them able to quote verbatim specified passages from Shakespeare, Dickens, Omar Khayyam, Homer, Twain and Kafka; but to develop in them the skills necessary to enjoy critical and reflective reading; and that a by product of that may very well be verbatim recall. I would periodically demonstrate this as we discussed our

readings and viewings by supplying the verbatim dialogue to whatever scene was brought up in any given discussion.

Also, as a post script to an impromptu critical analysis of A TALE OF TWO CITIES, I quoted verbatim the opening paragraph and the closing paragraph of the book which I hadn't read since a high school sophomore in 1963.

Also, as the academic year wore on, I would periodically quote individual students in the context of relating a comment that one of us had just made to a comment made by one of us several months earlier. The reaction was always one of, "How can you REMEMBER that?! Even I forgot that I said that. But, yeah, that's right: I did say that." Through this process the students developed an ability to recall the entire course in all of its components. They especially noticed that they were able to recall literature readings on the basis of recalling our discussions on them. And, of course, the discussions which involved recall of past readings in relationship to current readings were very substantial and satisfying to all.

As we proceeded with our readings and video viewings, it seemed that every topic of discussion to date and every work studied to date continued to be relevant to each succeeding topic and work. The concept "self" seemed to always be present.

When we were reading ICEBERG HERMIT, I mentioned that there are periods in your life when you are doing something

which may or may not fit your self identity. Rei piped up with, "Yeah, the movie 'Pretty Woman' is about that."

"In what way?" I asked

"Well, in 'Pretty Woman' Julia Roberts is one of those hookey girls.."

"What? Do you mean 'hooker'?"

"Yeah, 'hooker'. Well, she was ....."

Rei proceeded to narrate the entirety of the story as it illustrated the point that sometimes it occurs to a person that she is in an occupation which she decides does not fit her self identity. As she proceeded, Rei would periodically stop and say, "I've talked for too long already". But the rest of the class and I sat there encouraging her to go on. In hindsight, it seems that although it would be traditionally customary for the teacher to politely cut off Rei's narration with, "That's very interesting, but we don't have time to talk about a movie now", the time that Rei took to give the class the narration composed 8 of the most valuable minutes in the year's course in terms of illustrating a point I was making so that it would be understood and remembered by all the members of the class.

Takeaki had a knack for bringing up the kind of questions which both built to the knowledge and the reflective skills acquired by the class. While studying ONCE IN THE SADDLE, the general theme for the entire unit was the cowboy cattle drive way of life, what with its danger, drudgery and demanded skills being far beyond the wages paid - wages that would be blown on

whiskey and women within 48 hours of hitting the trail town - being a pretty stupid way to earn a living if one were analyzing it from an economic perspective; but that being a cowboy was something a man WAS, not something he did to earn money. Within all this, Takeaki suddenly asked, "Did the cowboys have watches?"

I looked at Takeaki and all the other students with whom I had been actively engaged in a graduate school level discussion and answered, "They didn't have wrist watches, but some of them had pocket watches."

"Did they have batteries?" Takeaki continued.

"No."

"Then how did they run?" Takeaki asked

I asked the class, "Doesn't anyone here know?" as I looked at each face around the discussion table. Each face looked blank. Saying the words, "with a spring" didn't help. Here was a class full of students who can explain the basics of computer operations but who sat there intensely concentrating to fathom my explanation of how a coiled spring could supply power to the type of watches people used before watches had batteries.

When we started the unit on TESTAMENT OF YOUTH focusing on the World War I years, Takeaki asked, "Was the Depression caused by World War I?"

"Not directly," I told the class. "World War I ended on November 11, 1918 and the Depression didn't begin until October

29, 1929: eleven years later."

"How do you KNOW that?!" Takeaki asked in fascination. "You weren't even BORN yet!" The same information that will bore students to yawning proportions when delivered as part of a lecture will fascinate them when given in response to a question in a conversational tone.

When we read and discussed TESTAMENT OF YOUTH which accents the frustrations of youth in contrast to "Youth" which accents the joys of youth, Takeaki asked, "Why is it that when you become a youth, you want to look at pictures of naked women?"

Before I could give any answer, Mieko recited, "Hormones".

"That's what a textbook will tell you. But you aren't going to get a male homosexual to want to look at pictures of naked women by injecting him with the appropriate hormones," I retorted.

"Was that a stupid question?" asked Takeaki.

"No! It is a very good question." I assured Takeaki. "Both TIME and NEWSWEEK have recently run cover stories on just such a question. Both magazines have pointed out that nobody really knows the answer to that question yet.

Because of discussing the joys of youth in "Youth" and the frustrations of youth in TESTAMENT OF YOUTH, the students asked me what is the best part of life. I told them that the answer is different for each individual; but that for me the best part of my life was that current year being there with them in the

mornings before going on the my noon to 9 PM job as Britannica's national senior manager to a network of English conversation schools: a position which had me every day listening to the immature and selfish, if not emotionally unstable complaints and whinings of sales agents, teachers, facility managers and headquarters personnel from all over the country. In contrast to that, my literature class students shone out as nobility personified.

Even when a discipline situation arose, the nobility of the students shone out. Because the native language of every student, even the American Jin, was Japanese, a constant temptation to speak Japanese existed. At the beginning of one class all of the boys were speaking loudly in Japanese about a matter not connected with the course. I expected them to stop of their own accord so that the class could begin. When the boys continued their discussion in Japanese, I directed them without anger but with authority to take their anthologies (ENGLAND IN LITERATURE) to the kitchen and write out the answers to questions 1,6,7 and 8 on page 583. All of the boys immediately stopped talking, took their books to the kitchen and returned with their fully written papers 30 minutes later. This entire incident involved no warning and no lecturing on my part. It involved no whining questioning and no refusals on their part. Nothing like it ever had to be repeated again throughout the course of the year.

THE WRITE-UPS

The classroom discussions in themselves served as brainstorming sessions, prewriting and revising. When I felt that the students were ready to write up the thoughts generated by the discussions, I would announce, "Well, it seems that you all have most of the assignment done already. Now, all you have to do is write up what we have been talking about during this unit." I would also give them specific guide questions.

Our relationship was such that the students knew my purpose was not to get them to write an essay for me; that my purpose was to help them develop the skills which would serve them after graduating from high school. I told them honestly of my memory of American high schools in the 1960's having the motivation, for status and funding purposes, of getting as many students as possible INTO college but neglecting to teach them the necessary skills to succeed once they were there; and how it was complacently accepted as a natural fact of academic life that 55% of all first year college students would flunk out or simply choose to leave because of being unprepared for, therefore disenchanted with, college life.

Therefore, when the students asked, "Should we write up what is in the book, what we said, what you said, or our own original thoughts?", they meant, "What should we do as college and university students?"

My answer was given not as an authority figure but as someone who had been there before and was there to show them the way. "Do everything; if possible. It depends on the professors you get. Of course, almost any professor you get is going to have his ego tickled by seeing you repeat his thoughts on essays. And that will probably get you a better grade. Having your own original thoughts is very good. But one important thing to remember is that you really don't have to worry about having original thoughts. Just follow the format."

What developed, of course, is that the more I told them not to worry about having original thoughts, the more they developed original thoughts. The more they noticed my sincerity in telling them NOT to write for me but for themselves, the more they wrote for the purpose of eliciting positive reinforcement from me.

The students seemed to derive further confidence in approaching their writing assignments when I told them that in my personal opinion, I could give each of them a grade on the basis of my impression of their understanding of the material based on their class discussion participation: even if that meant awarding a "B" grade for attentive and apparently knowledgeable silence and a "D" grade for what appeared to be silent apathy and ignorance. "But I"m sure if I did that someone would eventually complain of such a system as being inaccurate and unfair; so please write up what I already know you know."

When announcing the writing assignment, I was always flexible about the date due. "Please turn in your essay sometime between this Thursday and next Tuesday." As the essays trickled in between Thursday and Tuesday, I would savor each one as I read it aloud in class. Mieko would often ask, "Please don't read mine"; and I would respect that request. But Takeaki would specifically ask for my evaluation on every aspect of his essay. Of course, reading entire essays in a savoring fashion in class was one more component of the class which gave important feedback and sharing while at the same time giving the students the impression that they were escaping from further "study".

Instead of reading one student's entire essay to the class in one droning narration and then asking, "What do you think of that essay?", I would read the essay sentence by sentence and, where appropriate, periodically ask, "What's good about that sentence?" and "What's weak about that sentence?" Once the class got used to this pair of questions as regular discussion stimulators, nobody felt publicly picked on when his essay was being read. When a sentence was incomprehensible to me as the reader, I would ask the author in a coffee shop conversational tone, "What do you mean?" The elicited discussion always felt not like a teacher trying to elicit the appropriate answer (nor like a student trying to come up with the "right" answer), but like a roomful of fellow graduate students enthusiastically discussing something.

I was always sincerely surprised and pleased at the original thoughts that were handed in on the essays: "Hey, this is great! We didn't talk about this in class and it is a good point!" Then I would read a bit more and spontaneously exclaim, "Hey! This is a good point. I never thought of that before, but it is true."

Ironically, one ultimate result of this system of write-ups as an after thought to home readings and classroom discussions was an observation and suggestion from the Hokkaido International School Headmaster, "You know, your students are really learning how to write. Perhaps we should change the name of your literature class to 'Creative Writing'".

To test whether the course had achieved the goal of real retention in the students, both the end of year home essay and the in-class final examination involved material covered between September and June. Furthermore, the specific date of the final exam was not announced in advance. The students knew that one day near the end of the year there would be a final exam which would involve all of our yearly material but they were not told on what day it would be. They knew that the reason for such an approach was to prevent the possibility of cramming before the exam.

The final examination was given in class on a day when all the students showed up. None of the students complained or whined about the final examination being "sprung" on them in such a way. The examination consisted of a series of essay

guide questions with instructions directing the students to either give short essays to several questions or developed essays to only two or three questions. Every student turned in final examination papers which demonstated recall of analysis of the entire year's study.

POSTSCRIPTS

By January it occurred to me that compared to what Hokkaido International School had for me to do, at Britannica I was "one of those hookey guys" sopping up the money that was to be made in the English conversation industry in Japan but not really doing anything substantial to educate anybody.

When I told the class in April that I was leaving Britannica to become a full time teacher at H.I.S. from September, Takeaki asked me, "What about your self identity as a senior manager?"

I told them that I had taken on a new self identity as a teacher involved with real education, not the backdrop for book sales and conversation salon memberships that Britannica was running.

In June Masaki graduated. He is now attending a small college in the United States.

The day after graduation I went to Hawaii to take summer education courses at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

Rei, Mieko and Tomoko went to America as exchange students.

Rei went to Boston. I recently got a letter from the

academic dean at Rei's school expressing congratulations for my influence on her.

Mieko went to Kentucky. Mieko's school sent Hokkaido International School a FAX communicating Mieko's superior level of adjustment to life in Kentucky with her host family and at her American school.

Tomoko went to Utah. She recently wrote me a six page letter which demonstrates developed powers of observation, analysis, description and retention.

Jin, Takeaki and Azusa are still students at Hokkaido International School. I recently told Azusa that I was writing a report about our class last year and paraphrased what I planned to write regarding our first discussions:

"When I asked the class to compare and contrast SHANE with 'Hondo' nobody said anything. When I pointed out that the main character of both stories is the title, they exclaimed 'We can use something that simple?'"

Azusa smiled wistfully. "I remember that. That class was fun."

TYPED VERSION OF LETTER FROM TOMOKO

Note: sometimes in the letter Tomoko uses Japanese words written in the Japanese phonetic alphebet known as Hieragana. I have transliterated the Hieragana into capital letters and translated the word into English.

Dear Mr. Hill, Nov. 13, 1992

Thank you so much for your letter and the pictures. Please excuse this unprofessional paper. I don't have any regular letter paper either. I never use them.

Well, how is your life going? Is the full time job at H.I.S. fun? I was glad to hear that H.I.S. is getting more respect from the Japanese eudcational community. I think English education of MONBUSHO (Japanese Ministry of Education) is terrible. Japanese students will never be able to speak English. I've seen tons of people whose first language is not English. There are 4 Japanese (including me), 1 Dane, 1 Brazilian, 1 Spanish foreign exchange students in my high school now. Actually, there are tons of Mexican people and Vietnamese also. They are not exchange students, though. Anyway, those exchange students speak English very well. I think only Japanese exchange students can't communicate in English. I'm scared of thinking about the hard time I would have if I didn't go to H.I.S. first.

I heard about the new boys who don't even try to study or do homework from Azusa, too. Don't they really try to do anything? I can hardly believe that. I guess they study at

home but it just doesn't show up like my first year at H.I.S. It was terrible! I had to stay up like until 2 or 3 in the morning everyday to get done my homework. Sometimes I didn't even get to sleep for a moment. My first essay about HIDEYOSHI TOYOTOMI was worst. Do you remember about it? You told us to write some report about somebody we respect or something. And I went to a library and read it in Japanese. And then I was going to write about it in English. But I had no idea. I mean, I could not even write down the story that I just read even though there was a perfect idea in my mind. All I could write was when he became SHOGUN from a poor farmer. I didn't know how I suppose to build the sentences, so I just put "He became--when he was--." I used this phrase a million times in the report because that was all I could do for my best. And I spent whole night for that stupid report. Plus, since you said it has to be more than two pages long or something, I was suffering to try to make it longer. I made each letter big so that it fills paper fast. I was so sad when I read it over because it sound terrible. I knew that wasn't good essay, but there was no way to fix though. I'm better at writing than at that time. I am actually still having hard time though.

Well, I'm still surviving in Utah. First, when I just get here, I really loved here. I'd been thinking about going to college here, too, but not any more, because Mormon people control everything here, and you can't do anything really. Well, I still like Utah which is not so dangerous (I haven't

seen people taking drug at school yet), clean, and people is so nice, though I just don't want to live here that long. Plus, I don't like my host family. Well, I guess I like tham. I really appreciate them, and they treat me so nice. Well, I guess I'm negative and bad, and I don't want to be like that. But I still have tons of stuff to complain about them and America. They are crazy. Did I really look happy with my host family? I guess not. They like to live with strangers, so there are 5 people inculding me who are not even their related in this house (used to be 6 strangers). There is a fat couple (they are nice, they take me to the movies sometimes, and it's not Disney one.), a funny guy (he is interested in Japanese language, so I've been teaching him), a critical guy (he is nice and everytime when I am doing my homework, he asks me if I need any help. But he is so critical about anything except his girlfriend), 3 of my host sisters (one, 20 year old sweet girl, only thinks about her boyfriend all the time, one who is a sophomore at my school, and one is a 7 year old very spoiled selfish girl), and host parents (a nice peaceful gentle man & a beautiful disputatious lady).

As you notice, the problem is the little sister, Angela, and the host mother, Lucy. Angela's toy room is just like a toy shop. She is also mean and rude. She looked at my face and said, "Japanese people always have this kind of weird face. How come your face is flat like this? (as she push her nose and eyelids so that they look flat)". How rude! And she also

scream and yeall and cry so hard when she can't do what she wants. I know she is just a little child, but I can't take it sometimes. How she talk is so NIKUTARASHII (nasty). Lucy is worse. She argue all the time anywhere. Plus, she thinks she is always right, so she has to win everytime and she tells everybody what to do. I'm taking the missionary lesson from Mormon, and that discussion is divided into six parts. I am on number 5 right now. I'm taking the lesson in Japanese because Lucy said that's good for me because I can feel more deeply if I study in my language. And now she is trying to have me to take it in Englih all over again. That's stupid. why do I have to tke it all over again? I can't believe those kind of stuff. I always ask hard questions to the missionaries and they suffer to answer these questions. It's so fun.. but I don't want to start all over same thing. I did once and that's enough for me.

Well, I know most of exchange students at my school, and none of them are satisfied with their host families. And I think nobody can be satisfied because they are not real family. But the worst thing about my host family is that they don't cook. In the morning, nobody eats. At night, nobody is home because they are so busy. They own one toy shop, two day care centers, one Italian Restaurant (Lucy is working there most of the time), and something called Wedding World. Plus, Mike (host father) works at somewhere as a counselor. From Monday to Wednesday, Lucy gets home at around 4, and sometimes cooks

dinner because Monday is the day called Family Home Evening or something, and it's a Mormon thing. So every Monday, Lucy's old daughters who left home because they married come to house with their kids and we have big dinner. So Lucy cooks on Monday, but Tuesday and Wednesday usually she doesn't. From Thursday to Saturday, she never cooks because she comes home midnight. And every day Mike picks up Angela after work and go to some fast food shop and come home. They always tell me, "Tomoko, you can eat whatever you want in the refrigerator", and I know there is only moldy cheese and spoiled milk. So I have to go eat or get something at store. This is funny. They think they treat me so nice which is true in some way, and they love me. And I like them, too. My host family is not worst in the all of host families of exchange students I know. So I'm OK. And I'm going to survive and see you in summer, Mr. Hill. Oh, guess what! My rich host family's going on a trip to Mississippi on Christmas, and they gonna take me, too. We are going to stay at a wealthy steamboat for a week. Ha Ha Ha! So it's not so bad to stay with this family.

Now I can understand why you blame Japanese T.V. show. American T.V. shows are totally different from Japanese show especialy comedy show. Japanese comedy show is based on nasty conversation and they are so GEHIN (crass). They do whatever they want. Seems like there is no rules. And joke is different. I mean they are both funny but these are different kind of joke. And Japanese comedy show is much funny to me

because I grew up with those stuff. Ive seen those stuff for 17 years. But I can understand why you blame Japanese comedian except SHIMURA KEN (name of a Japanese comedian Tomoko knows I like).

You complain about Japan and Japanese people a lot though. I have a question. "Do you like Japan and Do you like America?" I do. I like both in different way. American and Japanese people have different cultures and we think everything different way, so sometimes they cause problems, but I think it is good.

My view is still narrow and I haven't seen and known so many things, yet. So I want to live in Japan in my future because it's my country and that is the place I feel comfortable (It depends on the area, though.) But if I'd live here in America for a long time like 10 years or more, I might think I want to live in America forever.

Did you see movie called "Mr. Baseball"? You probably see it next year in Japan. That movie shows how small Japan is. It's a fun movie and it's not a Disney movie. I went to this movie without telling Lucy because she is going to be mad at me if I told her. She has tons of video at home but only Disney or Musical stuff.

Well, everytime I am suffering to think of how to finish writing letter. I don't like to write something like, "Well, I have to stop writing this letter for now because I've got tons of work to do." But if I stop the letter suddenly, people

would be surprised. So I just say, "See you", for now because I don't have any idea today, either. Today is Nov. 23, 1992, so it took me writing 10 days.

Oh, one more thing. I am taking the Driver's Ed. now, and I've done one range and two simulation classes. I am doing terrible. I can't control the car at all, and I can't get the timing to turn. So my range teacher who is so rude, yelled at me many times. I didn't know nobody ride with me at the range. I have to do everything by myself. So that was so scary. When we supposed to go straight ahead, I went to backward, and the road teacher, Mr. Peterson who was looking at me from upstairs screamed at me through the radio, "Don't you understand English? You're not doing what I said! You don't know English very well, Ha!" And everybody in other cars could hear that voice. That was so embarrassing. I understood everything what he said. But the thing was that I just couldn't follow the direction!

Tomoko Koyama